

THE EDIBLE GARDEN

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Peanuts Are Not Nuts Peanuts Are Legumes

Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

Arachis hypogaea is also known as the goober, groundnut or earth almond.

In ancient Peruvian ruins, traces of peanuts have been found going back as far as 800 BC. By the beginning of the 16th century, peanuts had become a staple of major importance, and Spanish and Portuguese ships were regularly importing plants from South America to Europe and eventually to North America, especially Georgia and the Carolinas.

The cultivation of peanuts is most successful if certain conditions are well met: long hot summers, full sun, well-drained soil that is light and on the sandy side, pH 6.0 to 6.5, southern exposure, ideally US zones 5b to 9b.

Why might we attempt to grow them in Ottawa, Canadian Zone 5b? One answer is that most gardeners love to experiment from time to time. A second answer would be that there are ways to succeed even as far north as our dear city. Common varieties include Virginia Runner, Improved Spanish and Valencia. Of these, Improved Spanish is probably the best for our zone. In terms of growth habit, two types of peanuts are self-explanatory: "Runner" and "Bunch".

Most gardeners already start some plants indoors, and can include peanuts among the other seeds they germinate for an early start on the growing season. Soaking the shells before planting is optional, and may improve germination. Peanuts can be planted hulled or left in shells, but if hulled do not remove the skin from the nut itself. Start peanuts in a large peat pot one month before the last frost.

If you sow seed directly into outdoor gardens the location can make or break the degree of success. To optimize results, choose a location that has a southern exposure – perhaps next to the house or an outbuilding or a fence. Seed depth should be 3x the size of the seed. Recommendations vary considerably when judging the right distance between each seed. I would recommend approximately 12.5 cm apart. You can always thin later on.

You can plant peanuts in a row of small mounds, especially if your garden floods when there's too much rain. Mounds improve drainage and more readily absorb heat from the sun. Build the mounds 45cm apart and plant 4 nuts per mound to a depth of 10cm. If every seed in every mound sprouts, you get to choose the healthiest and compost the rest. Keep the mounds hilled up. Plants will grow to 30 or even 60cm high, and yellow pea-like flowers will begin to open. The fertilized stalks (pegs) will curve down into the soil where the seed of each fertilized flower will germinate and begin to ripen. Peanuts are the only legume that does this. Loose soil is essential so that pegs can easily penetrate and get down to the business of producing peanuts. Water the plants to a depth of 2.5cm per week. Established peanut plants are generally drought resistant. Control the competition by weeding regularly. If possible plant peanuts in a different location each year. Be patient. The growing cycle lasts from 4 to 5 months. *Arachis hypogaea* is frost tolerant to 9°C.

When foliage begins to yellow, do a test run on the side of one hill. If the test peanut looks well filled out, lift the whole bunch with a fork and shake off the dirt. Then hang the bunch-



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Vegetable of the Year 2019 is Mixed Carrots

Dale Odorizzi
Master Gardener of Lanark County

Why is the lowly carrot the vegetable of the year? And if carrots, why mixed carrots?



Freshly harvested carrots

Dale Odorizzi

There is no vegetable I eat more often than carrots. They are delicious in so many ways—boiled, roasted, mashed, steamed, grated, or in a stir fry. Best of all is a carrot pulled fresh from the soil with most of the soil wiped off on your shirt, and crunched down on, right in your garden. Their flavour is earthy and sweet. Purple carrots can be more intensely sweet while white and yellow carrots have a delicious mildly nutty flavour.

For many of us, when we think carrot, we think of the long orange vegetables that we get at the grocery stores but there are so

es in an attic or outbuilding where they can dry. Or remove pods and lay them to dry on a screen in a warm place. Let cure for two months. Do not put them in a dark, dank basement. After two months of drying/curing you should have edible nuts.

Peanuts can be grown in a greenhouse or as house plants. As house plants they will need 16 to 18 hours of light per day. An ideal growing temperature range is 21-26°C. Too hot and flowers will be damaged. Too cool and the plants may simply stop growing. Temperature can be more easily controlled with the application of two inches of mulch.

In 1995 when we retired to acreage near North Gower I experimented with growing peanuts. I located them in full sun with iffy soil and was able to harvest a handful of immature nuts. I had not factored in the curing phase, and would know better now.

My other bit of peanut growing experience was by accident. In 2018 I noticed a discarded peanut lying in one of the flower beds, and would have left if there or composted it had I not noticed that there were sprouts coming out of the side of the hull. Here was an errant peanut that the squirrels had misplaced. I planted it and soon it produced healthy looking stems with healthy looking leaves. I fixed a wire cage over it with a brick on top. Alas one morning I found the cage off and the plant minus the nut beside it. Squirrels must have retrieved their lost loot. Resuscitation failed. It was the little peanut that could have been.

So why try? Peanuts are an important crop that has many uses. They are nitrogen fixers and can be grown as green compost and plowed back into the soil, or harvested and left to decompose in compost piles or bins. Or if you happen to have a pet pig they are great forage plants. These nuts-that-are-not-nuts contain Vitamins B and E and notably are 30% protein. They are also a major source of healthy oil.

Swiss Chard *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *Cicia*

Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

Chenopodiaceae - beet, chard, and spinach

Although swiss chard is native to southern Europe, its name is probably due to its popularity in Swiss cuisine. Also swiss chard sounds much better than *Beta vulgaris*.

Swiss chard is not a demanding vegetable. It tolerates heat but prefers cooler weather. It can be sown indoors starting May 10th to 25th. Plant seeds 1cm deep. Fertile well drained soil will produce the best results and a pH of 6.5 to 7.5 is ideal. When transplanting leave 12.5cm between each plant and thin to 25cm apart. Cook thinnings or put them in salads. Swiss chard does well with harvesting of a few stems and leaves at a time; this way it can be enjoyed fresh many times throughout the summer. Come fall and after the first frost, chard should be completely harvested for maximum tastiness.

Swiss chard is a plant of many colours all of which are enhanced by its beautiful green crinkly leaves. Stems and leaves are both pleasantly edible. Swiss chard was grown on the prairies of my youth but this was before some of the new and colourful varieties became available. Perhaps my family enjoyed **Fordhook Giant**, a "Heritage" variety – with wide white stems and generously wrinkled leaves.



Swiss Chard
Edythe Falconer

many other colours and shapes and seeds readily available. Dieticians encourage us to eat 'the rainbow' and these carrots can provide the full rainbow.

The cultivated carrot is one of the most important root vegetables grown in the temperate regions. The earliest vegetable is known to be the carrot, dating from the 10th century in Persia and Asia Minor. They were quite unlike our orange rooted carrot of today and were originally purple or white with a thin root. A mutation occurred which removed the purple pigmentation resulting in a new race of yellow carrots from which our orange carrots were subsequently developed.

Growing carrots is relatively simple. Sow the seed as soon as the soil warms up in the spring. Carrots grow slowly so we can usually only get one crop, but a second sowing can take place later in the year so you can enjoy baby carrots late in the season.

Soil structure is essential. For long straight carrots, the soil should be sandy loam. Avoid rocky soil. If your carrot root hits even a small pebble, it will fork. They still taste delicious, but they are more difficult to harvest and do not look as attractive. Heavy clay soil is not a good choice either, as carrots tend to grow more slowly and irregularly in dense soil. If you have a heavy soil, dig in lots of organic material to loosen it up. Use well rotted manure or compost and avoid nitrogen rich fertilizers as they also can cause forked roots, especially applied around sowing time. Transplanting carrot seedlings can be another cause for carrot forking.

Sow your carrot seeds about 5 mm deep, covering them with loose soil or sand. Carrot seeds are tiny and slow to germinate, taking from 1-3 weeks. The seedlings grow slowly. I have had success planting radish seeds along with my carrot seeds. The radishes germinate and grow quickly, marking the carrot area and help to keep the soil from crusting over the carrots. They are fully matured in plenty of time for the carrots to grow. Because the seeds are so tiny, it is very easy to plant too many seeds, too closely together. If using the square foot method, there should only be 16 seeds per square foot. As your carrots grow, you should thin them to about 5 cm apart. Mulch to keep the carrots' shoulders from showing as they will turn green and taste

VARIETIES

Celebration: 55 days – multicolored petioles and stems – red, yellow, pink, orange and white – 50cm

Bright Lights: 55 days – similar array of colours – leaves have lighter taste

Silverado: 55 – 60 days - white stems and petioles

Burpee's Rhubarb Chard: "Heritage" 60 days

Fordhook Giant: "Heritage" 50 to 60 days – similar to Silverado

Canary Yellow: 50 days – orange yellow combination

Peppermint : 55 to 60 days

Flamingo Pink: "Heritage" 60 days

Magenta Sunset: 25 to 30 days

Eldorado: 60 to 65 days

Sometimes I think the chards are almost too pretty to eat. Then I have to concede that it's too tasty to ignore. Indeed it is a beautiful plant and can function as an ornamental in any garden bed.

How and why to use it? The leaves can be cooked like spinach or beet greens, the mid ribs and stems like asparagus or celery. Chards are rich in potassium and Vitamins A and C and also contain moderate amounts of iron and B-6, and they are low in calories! Swiss chard can be kept raw for three days, 5 days cooked and in a freezer up to 12 months.

Dressing cooked greens with oil and vinegar or butter and lemon juice is a straight forward way of using this plant. Complementary flavours include lemon butter, basil, nutmeg, parsley, gallica, pine nuts, and mushrooms.

Four plants per year are sufficient for the average family, or you can buy Swiss chard in many grocery stores. That is what I did when I was attracted to a recipe in the Globe and Mail back in November 2018 – a Chard Tart – a bit tricky but well worth the extra effort.

Many standard cook books will yield up one or more attractive recipes for Swiss chard as will "Mr. Google".

Recipe: Carrot Cake

Dale Odorizzi, Master Gardener of Lanark County

Moist and delicious and easy to make. We have this most often in late fall when there are "forked" carrots, damaged in digging or in early spring when stored carrots are a little past their prime.

Ingredients

2 cups all purpose flour
2 cups white sugar
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
1 tsp ground cinnamon
3 cups finely shredded carrots
1 cup cooking oil
4 eggs
½ cups chopped walnuts
½ cups raisins

Instructions

Stir together dry ingredients.
Add carrot, oil and eggs. Beat on medium speed for 2 minutes.
Mix in raisins and nuts if using.
Pour into a greased 33X23cm pan. Bake at 165°C for 50 to 60 minutes.

Cream Cheese Frosting—

Soften one 85g package of cream cheese and ¼ cup butter and beat together until fluffy.
Slowly beat in 2 cups icing sugar until smooth. Stir in 1 tsp vanilla.

Watch for *Trowel Talk* the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Lanark County Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab.

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bitter. Be sure to eat the carrot seedlings you pull out -- as you will find they are delicious!

Carrots can be harvested anytime before winter sets in. If you are harvesting for storage, they are best left in the ground until after a frost, as they will taste better. They will keep 2-4 weeks in the refrigerator and most of the winter in a root cellar or cold storage, layered in sand. Keep them away from apples and pears. Carrot tops are edible too and can be used much like parsley.

<http://www.carrotmuseum.co.uk>

Introducing soil Part 1

*Susan Bicket
Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton*

My **Oxford English dictionary** offers as one definition of soil "*The ground, upper layer of earth in which plants grow*". The **Chambers English dictionary** is "*the mixture of disintegrated rock and organic material which nourishes plants*". My favourite from **Teaming with microbes** "*Soil is the house in which all organisms of the soil food web live*". Soil is all of this and more, it underpins all land based food chains and its health is critical to our ability to feed ourselves.

Soil supports vegetative growth, which provide food, medicine, fuel, raw materials for clothes, building and furnishings. It plays a big part in the water cycle, controlling the flow of water and chemicals between the ground and atmosphere, filtering pollutants. It stores and releases gases such as oxygen and carbon dioxide. It is home to a multitude of organisms from microscopic to much larger animals and insects.

We, as gardeners tend to describe soil by:

Texture - clay, sandy, silty, loamy, peaty
Structure - loose, friable, compacted, good tilth, forms a crust, cloddy, fluffy, muck
pH – acidic, neutral or alkaline,
Fertility – rich, fertile, infertile, deficient,
Water retention – dry, moist, wet, well drained, water logged
Profile – deep, thin
Composition—the mix of mineral particles, organic matter and the spaces between.
Biological activity—life forms it supports including plants.

In this series we will examine some of these aspects of soil.